DISCLAIMER

Notice: This presentation was provided as part of the EPA Region 10 Environmental Justice Stakeholder Forum. This document does not constitute EPA policy. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation for use. Links to non-EPA web sites do not imply any official EPA endorsement of, or a responsibility for, the opinions, ideas, data, or products presented at those locations, or guarantee the validity of the information provided. Links to non-EPA servers are provided solely as a pointer to information that may be useful to interested persons.

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

Shavone Hasse
Idaho Concerned Area Residents for the Environment (ICARE)
http://idahocares.org/

Presentation Photographs: ICARE presentation photo flickr page

Introduction. I'm here today on behalf of Idaho Concerned Area Residents for the Environment (I.C.A.R.E.). ICARE is a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) watchdog group and community organization.

What is a CAFO?

CAFOs go by many names-- factory farms, animal factories, industrial farm animal production facilities—but what all these names are trying to capture is very simple: CAFOs confine a lot of one type of animal in a small amount of space, and the animals are not given access to pasture. The regulatory definition, of course, is a bit more complicated. [slide: EPA CAFO chart]. A Large CAFO houses 700 or more mature dairy cattle, 1,000 or more beef cows, 2,500 pigs, 10,000 laying hens, 30,000 to 125,000 chickens (depending on the manure handling system), and so on.

CAFOs are meat & dairy production factories, not farms. Farms will have around 1-2 cows per acre (or the equivalent)—more than that, and you've got a CAFO.

CAFOs are also one of the few things in life that adhere to the "I know it when I see it" rule. For example: [Slides: photos of farms vs. CAFOs]

CAFO Consequences.

As you can tell, CAFOs are an eyesore. They also stink to high heaven: I have a 7,500 head beef feedlot in my backyard, and I can tell you that come evening in summer or a wet spring or fall day, you don't want to be outside—it smells so strongly of vomit, it'll knock you over.

But CAFOs aren't just a nuisance. The distinctive stench of a CAFO is that of hazardous noxious gases like ammonia and hydrogen sulfide. Cows in open-air feedlots kick up tons of particulate matter when they start stirring around in the morning and evening.

And, like many other kinds of factories, CAFOs, in addition to producing plenty of seemingly "cheap," uniform animal protein widgets, **produce a lot of waste**. Where on traditional farms manure is a valuable resource—the largest source of soil fertility—**CAFO manure is waste** in every sense of the word.

The sheer quantity and concentration of CAFO waste makes it practically impossible to apply to surrounding cropland in a responsible way; as such, over-application and outright dumping are routine. In Idaho, dumping of CAFO waste has led to soil phosphorous levels 10x the state threshold for ground and surface water concern. In areas where the soil has overheated from this excess of nutrients, crops will no longer grow. The run-off from phosphorous overloaded fields has turned the Snake River and many of its tributary streams and rivers into one big open sewer. This year, the Snake was choked with algae from May clear through to October.

Waste dumping has not only threatened the viability of our farm ground, streams and rivers—it has contaminated ground (drinking) water in every CAFO-heavy county in the state. Idaho has 30+designated nitrate priority areas, but in three counties in the middle of Idaho's CAFO country, we've got a bonus: in addition to dangerous nitrate levels, our Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has confirmed the presence of 6 different types of livestock-only antibiotics as well as endocrine-disrupting hormones in ground water. In fact, it's so out of control that DEQ has told residents that if they've got elevated nitrate in their drinking water, they've probably got several (if not all), of these "emerging" contaminants as well.

CAFO pollution has serious public health implications. In Idaho and in CAFO-beseiged communities across the country, CAFO neighbors suffer from rare cancers, asthma, depression and chronic fatigue. CAFO workers and workers in the mega-slaughterhouses supplied by CAFOs have significantly higher rates of colonization and infection by antibiotic resistant bacteria. Meanwhile state and local authorities, more concerned with catering to the offending industry, try to pretend not to notice.

Examples:

In Weiser, ID a 7,000 head beef CAFO contaminated 22 private wells with three types of Sulfa-class livestock-only antibiotics, beta-estradiol-- an endocrine disrupting hormone common in beef cattle production-- nitrate and e-coli. Despite being under state and federal investigation and monitoring for four years, the CAFO was never even fined. The neighbors, who couldn't afford to dig deeper wells, had to buy drinking water from WalMart and pay for it out of their own pockets. The operation ultimately shut down not because of any regulatory action, but because the operator failed to make his mortgage payments on time. One of the neighbors of that facility documented a cancer cluster in the area—but when she brought this to the state's attention, her concerns were dismissed.

In 2008, in Jerome, ID, a 13 year-old boy named Kyle Blanc died of an asthma attack. On his death certificate, the doctors listed "environmental causes." Kyle's home is surrounded on all sides by 12 Large beef and dairy CAFOs housing at least 30,000 cows and almost nothing else. The nearest upwind facility—a dairy with about 2100 cows—has had chronic problems with black mold in the milking parlor for the past ten years. However, because the mold was cleaned up for the inspector on the following inspections, the fact that it kept coming back and having to be cleaned up didn't matter. This same facility is now seeking to expand its size by nearly double. Kyle's surviving 4-year-old sister is beginning to show symptoms of asthma.

CAFOs are also natural resource strip-mining operations. Estimates for agriculture's share of fresh water consumption in the US vary from 70 to 90 percent. Though direct livestock consumption only accounts for about 1% of Ag's bar tab, when you include the water required to produce feed for CAFOs, CAFOs' the share of that astronomical tally rises dramatically. Of the 87 million or so acres of corn grown in the US, three-quarters is fed to CAFO animals; for the 78 million acres of soybeans, 44% is used as CAFO feed.

When you look at the amount of water it takes to produce a single kilogram of CAFO meat, the efficiency argument so often used to defend CAFOs collapses.

Stats:
-1 kg Grain-fed beef (farm-to -consumer) = 3,682 liters of H20

-1 kg Soybeans = 2,000 liters H20
-1kg Rice = 1,900 liters H20
Other staple crops, like wheat and potatoes, require even less.
Source: Diet for a Small Planet

On the ground in Idaho, the consequence of the CAFOs' water mining has been drastically reduced river flows and domestic wells sucked dry.

Then, there's the antibiotic abuse required to keep CAFOs running smoothly and "efficiently." The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that 70+ percent of the antibiotics consumed yearly in the US are fed to CAFO animals to stave off sickness and promote faster weight gain. As any doctor will tell you, new drug development isn't keeping pace with the rapid evolution of antibiotic resistant bugs—in fact, just last year a brand-new strain of MRSA, livestock-associated MRSA, made its US debut—but this hasn't stopped CAFO lobbyists from screaming bloody murder at any and all attempts to curb their antibiotic abuse.

CAFO feed crops also account for a significant portion of the total pesticides and herbicides used in US agriculture, and thus a significant portion of the fossil fuel energy required to produce these poisons.

What ICARE is doing

In Idaho:

- Educate people about CAFOs through our website (idahocares.org) and other media;
- Organize communities to fight new CAFOs and proposed expansions (C Bar M, Minidoka, DeRuyter); collaborating with other groups (such as the United Farm Workers) to organize dairy and beef feedlot workers and improve working conditions;
- Holding local and state authorities accountable for their (in)actions (engaged in an audit of our state Department of Agriculture's CAFO waste files). Much more that we'd like to do in the near future, including a campaign to change institutional food buying patterns.

Nationally:

- working with national groups to push for policy change [farm bill (EQIP, subsidy reform); trade policies]

Why are CAFOs an EJ issue?

CAFOs and their corresponding processing facilities locate where land, labor, and elected officials are cheap, and large markets are easy to reach.

There are 414 Large beef & dairy CAFOs in Idaho. 234, or 57% of these are located in a four-county area known as the Magic Valley—Gooding, Jerome, Twin Falls, and Cassia. This area is home to a large part of Idaho's Latino community. It is also an area of high income inequality. The occupational hazards of CAFO work fall disproportionately on Latino immigrants and African refugees. As a side note, of the state's 414 Large CAFOs, only 103 (less than a quarter) have coverage under the NPDES general CAFO permit

(which, incidentally, expired in 2002. We've been waiting 8 years for a new permit).

There have been several studies on the disproportionate impact of CAFOs on the poor and people of color—Environmental Health Perspectives ["Socioeconomic and Community impacts of CAFOs"]. Most of these focus on swine and poultry CAFOs, but I can tell you that their findings hold true for beef and dairy CAFOs in Idaho. There's never just one CAFO—these things travel in packs.

Regionally & nationally-- the poisons used on feed crops affect farmworkers, rural communities, and downstream water quality

Globally--CAFOs are significant contributors to deforestation and climate change

In 2006, the UN FAO estimated that global livestock production accounts for 18% of total greenhouse gas emissions ("Livestock's Long Shadow"). There's been some debate over whether this figure is high enough, but you get the idea.

CAFOs also generate almost two-thirds of anthropogenic ammonia—read: acid rain and acidification of ecosystems.

The Center for Climate Strategies found that in 2005, transportation and agriculture accounted for "about 27% and 25% of Idaho's gross GHG emissions, respectively." By 2020, Idaho's gross GHG emissions are projected to climb to 56% above 1990 levels. As the major source of agricultural emissions, CAFOs are leading that charge.

Challenges

- Not a "sexy" issue. People take criticism of 'farmers' and their own consumption habits very personally.
- CAFOs are not very well regulated. Let me be very clear here: CAFOs are not farms; they are animal production factories. Agricultural exemptions are often used to cover CAFOs as well (misguidedly)
- Dealing with a powerful industry that accounts for a big portion of the state's economic activity. It doesn't matter to policy makers that the economic "benefits" fall primarily to a handful of wealthy land owners and processors, or that the economic "benefits" don't account for the cost of CAFO "externalities."
- Adverse political climate—including rifts between neighbors and workers
- Limited resources

How EPA can help

- **Put people before property. Organize priorities around human and civil rights.**
- Adopt the precautionary principle in permitting and rule making
- Full enforcement of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act (a new Idaho CAFO permit would help!), Safe Drinking Water Act, CERCLA & EPCRA. Use the Sole Source Aquifer program. Stick to a 'polluters pay' policy for preventative measures (such as monitoring programs) and clean-up—bankrupt CAFOs almost inevitably become Brownfields; this just adds insult to injury.

- Revisit interagency MOUs, especially those with USDA & FDA.
- Be willing to challenge local and state government agencies and officials as well as industry. Cooperation is a lovely idea, but sometimes confrontation is necessary.
- Accept that Environmental Equity =/= Environmental Justice
- If you want our input, go to where we are. A large number of CAFO neighbors and workers don't have much in the way of computer skills, much less access to the internet. Improving language access is key here. Workers are probably your best source of information about environmental violations at CAFOs, but they can't report anything if no one speaks their language.